



# Soul of Soulless Conditions

37 years before Oscar Wilde wrote the “Soul of Man Under Socialism”, Karl Marx wrote his “[Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right](#)”. Marx expressed similar impatience with the Germans as Wilde did with the English, and with similar brilliance.

Even though he writes of the end of religion, yet Marx, with words that have forever since that time been famous, expressed his tender understanding of “the heart of a heartless world”. Those who only quote the part about the “opium of the people” miss this point. One who called religion “the sigh of the oppressed creature” could not have had contempt for religion, or for religious people.

Marx was 25 years old. He was the former editor of a distinguished (and then banned) magazine, and a Doctor of

Philosophy. For religion he had an appropriate, sympathetic and poetic respect. Marx did not make war on religion, but he was certainly proposing to storm the heights of philosophy. (For a version of the body of the work itself, as opposed to its Introduction attached and linked below, see [Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right](#) on MIA).

The linked text is the confident Introduction to an ambitious work that was never published in Marx's lifetime. He was proposing to issue a critique of the "Philosophy of Right", the most accessible of Hegel's works; works which still had prestige. The great philosopher had died thirteen years previously.

Neither Marx nor Engels wrote very much at all about religion in their subsequent four and five decades of life. This Introduction is the most substantial of Marx's writings on religion, insofar as it is about religion. But it is also about philosophy, and about class politics. Marx's first sentence claims criticism of religion as the prerequisite of all other criticism. But he seldom, if ever, leaned upon this point again in his later works.

Marx is concerned to establish, not the condition of religion, but the condition of life once the illusions of religion have left the minds of the living. Towards the end of the Introduction comes this question and answer:

*"Where, then, is the positive possibility of a German emancipation?"*

*“Answer: In the formulation of a class with radical chains, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering and claims no particular right because no particular wrong, but wrong generally, is perpetuated against it; which can invoke no historical, but only human, title; which does not stand in any one-sided antithesis to the consequences but in all-round antithesis to the premises of German statehood; a sphere, finally, which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society, which, in a word, is the complete loss of man and hence can win itself only through the complete re-winning of man. This dissolution of society as a particular estate is the proletariat.”*

This 1843 (written) statement is categorical evidence of Marx's commitment already at that time to the historical role of the working class. This was before Marx had teamed up with Engels. The team-up only happened later in 1844 (September), in Paris, France, although they had met briefly in Cologne, Germany, in November 1842.

What it also shows is Marx's conception of the arrival of the working class as the determining event going into the future; and this has implications, if true, for South Africa in 2013. The determining factor in South Africa's development will be the growth of the South African working class, both objectively and in terms of its subjective self-consciousness as a class.

Says Marx, nearly at the end of the Introduction:

*“Philosophy cannot realize itself without the transcendence of the proletariat, and the proletariat cannot transcend itself without the realization of philosophy.”*

This is the theme of our course. In terms of its capacity to fulfil its historic role, or not, philosophy will be the proletariat’s essential tool or weapon.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right, Intro, 1844, Marx.](#)
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